United Nations E/CN.6/2019/NGO/53

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
19 November 2018

Original: English

Commission on the Status of Women
Sixty-third session
11–22 March 2019
Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century"

Statement submitted by Priests for Life, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

18-19669 (E) 191218

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Statement

Priests for Life believes that social protection systems for gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls are needed throughout the life cycle if women's lives are to be valued and protected. Imbalanced sex ratios at birth demonstrate the lack of social protection for girls in the prenatal stage of life and are a sign of lethal male preference that not only results in gender inequality but gives rise to increased violence against women and girls throughout their lives.

Beijing Platform Called for Elimination of Prenatal Sex Selection

Priests for Life reminds the Commission on the Status of Women that twenty-four years ago the Beijing Platform for Action recognized prenatal sex selection as a severe form of discrimination and violence against girls that begins at the earliest stages of life and continues unabated throughout their lives. The Beijing Platform specified that prenatal sex selection is not only an act of violence against women but is violence against the girl child in the womb. Furthermore, it called on governments to eliminate all forms of discrimination against girls and the root causes of son preference. It recognized that discrimination against girls and boy child preference are harmful and result in unethical practices such as prenatal sex selection and female infanticide.

The consequences of the failure to stop the lethal practice of prenatal sex selection are dire for women and girls and result in increased needs for additional social protection systems to protect them from violence throughout their lives.

Research and data from the countries most affected by sex selection and resulting imbalanced sex ratios, India and China, demonstrate the disturbing outcome from the large number of missing girls and women due to sex selection abortion — increased acts of violence against surviving women and girls. Increases in kidnappings, rapes, sex trafficking and prostitution, bride-selling, and child marriage can be seen in countries with imbalanced birth ratios resulting in unprecedented social and economic challenges due to large number of missing women and girls.

Unless concerted action is taken to stop lethal prenatal sex discrimination, sex imbalances at birth are not only expected to continue but to rise compounded by access to prenatal sex determination testing kits and access to drugs for self-induced prenatal sex selection abortion. Demographers warn in Missing Girls: A Globalizing Issue that the systemic elimination of girls before their birth is the most extreme symptom of women's contemporary undervaluation.

The identification of a girl in the womb followed by her termination is the beginning of pernicious gender-based violence that perpetuates throughout a girl's life cycle. This discrimination not only denies millions of girls their basic right to existence and grossly undermines women's empowerment, but its continued prevalence is a global failure to protect the most vulnerable girls from the most lethal form of discrimination — sex selection abortion.

The Beijing Platform for Action recognized prenatal sex selection as violence and discrimination against girls and women and urged governments to prevent and *eliminate it. By failure to prevent* this act of gendercide, governments not only fail to provide social protection to girls in the earliest stages of life but such failure results in violence against women and girls throughout the life cycle, hinders social and economic development, and jeopardizes achievement of the Agenda 2030 to "leave no one behind".

Evidence from India: Sex selection Abortion Leads to Gender Based Violence

India exemplifies the severity of the devaluation of girls' lives and consequences of sex selection abortion as 1 in 4 girls do not live past puberty; 63 million females are missing from India's population resulting in a country full of men with an imbalanced sex ratio of 112 boys for every 100 girls with a corresponding increase in crimes against women. Crime records show that reported rapes of girls have more than doubled between 2012 and 2016 and more than 40 per cent of the country's female victims of rape were minor children.

Targeted research, Population Sex Ratios and Violence against Women: The Long Run Consequences of Sex Selection in India, demonstrates that male-biased population sex ratios generate violence against women in India and reveals that violence against girls and women has increased at such rate that it is now the fastest growing crime category. Recent sex crimes data demonstrates that states in India with the highest distorted sex ratio at birth have the highest rates of sexual assault against underage girls.

Global Concern

Prenatal sex selection combined with boy child preference is increasingly not confined to countries in Asia but is evident in imbalanced sex ratios in several countries in eastern Europe including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Montenegro, and Albania, and among ethnic groups around the world with serious social and economic implications impacting women's and girls' lives and well-being.

Demographic forecasts in Missing Girls: A Globalizing Issue warn that the systemic elimination of girls before their birth and the imbalanced sex ratios that follow will continue with dire consequences and the worldwide number of missing women from 2010–2050 will rise for two more decades before peaking at 150 million in 2035.

Sex Imbalances at Birth: Current Trends, Consequences and Policy Implications by The United Nations Population Fund, also warns that the situation for women and girls is likely to further deteriorate in some regions of the world in the years to come and that present-day sex ratios among children are going to have a lasting impact on population dynamics in Asia. Projections show that in China and India, men will already vastly outnumber women of marriageable age for over two generations. Marriage estimates also alarmingly suggest that the number of single men trying to marry after 2030 might exceed for several decades the corresponding number of unmarried women by 50–60 per cent in both countries.

The projected socio-economic consequences of these trends are alarming including potential risks for increased human rights violations such as abduction, trafficking and sale of women and girls for the purposes of marriage or sexual exploitation.

Conclusion

Warnings about the impact of sex selection abortion and distorted birth ratios that result must be heeded. Unless concerted action is taken to stop lethal prenatal sex discrimination, sex imbalances at birth are not only expected to continue but to rise compounded by access to prenatal sex determination testing and access to drugs for self-induced prenatal sex selection abortion.

Social protection for girls and women from the consequences of sex selection in countries and regions where men greatly outnumber women are becoming more urgent and will continue to lead to increased acts of violence against women and girls as the world moves to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Women's and girls' progress in education and employment opportunities are likely to be affected due to the increasing threat of violence against women and girls in public and private spaces.

It has been suggested that advocacy for unrestricted access to abortion has impeded progress on the elimination of prenatal sex selection and in providing social protection to girl children in the womb.

Priests for Life calls on the Commission for the Status of Women to urgently act to end prenatal sex selection abortion; recognized in the Beijing Platform for Action as an unethical act of violence and discrimination against women and girls that begins the cycle of violence that impacts women and girls throughout their lives.